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The Kremlin CIA and Gogol show

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MOSCOW, Jan. 14 — The allegation that the deposed Marxist President of Afghanistan was an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency appears to have been dropped by the Kremlin press.... Western diplomats said the charge... had been received incredulously around the world and this reaction may have embarrassed the Soviet leadership. — The New York Times

It was like a scene out of the last act of Gogol's "The Inspector General" when a

Mayor and other local officials realize they have been wrong — the visitor they have been treating as an inspector general is not an inspector general at all. But now the setting was the Kremlin and the leading characters somewhat higher in the governmental hierarchy:

Alexei (with a gesture expressive of perplexity). What is the meaning of it, gentlemen? How can we have made such a blunder?

Leonid (angrily). You are a fine bunch. How could I? Silly old sheep! Anyone should have been able to tell that Hafizullah Amin was not an agent of the CIA of imperialist USA. Now even the New York Times sees that we have given up such a wild, crazy notion.

Alexei. Less than a month ago...

Leonid. I know, just three days before we overthrew him...

Alexei. Pravda itself said he recognized our deep respect for the independence and national sovereignty of his country.

Leonid. Afghanistan?

Alexei. Afghanistan.

Leonid. How about it, dear lady of the KGB, whose name I shall not mention — where did you get the CIA connection?

KGB lady. It was not stupidity, as Comrade Dostoevsky said on the first page of his great "Brothers Karamazov," but just "senselessness, and a peculiar national form of it."

Leonid. There was nothing national about it. It was stupid. I told you to check Philip Agee's list of CIA agents.

KGB lady. Amin wasn't there.

Leonid. I told you to use the Freedom of Information Act, as we have done so often that Congress is thinking of limiting its use to US citizens.

KGB lady. We did. No Amin.

Leonid and Alexei. Then why did you tell the world Amin was a CIA agent?!

KGB lady. We didn't, Comrade, if I may be so bold. Your own Tass did.

Leonid. Be careful, dear lady. You might not like your next assignment. A buttered fig is what your explanations are. It's not enough to be made a laughingstock — there will come some scribbler, some inkslinger, to put us in a comedy.

KGB lady. What do I have to lose? Remember, Comrades, the old Russian proverb that scribbler Gogol used as an epigraph for "The Inspector General" — "It is no use blaming the mirror if your mug is crooked."

The End?